Volume One – 1977

SUPPORT THE UNDERGROUND GRAMMARIAN THROUGH PATREON.

THE UNDERGROUND GRAMMARIAN

Volume One, Number One……January 1977

EDITORIAL POLICIES

The Underground Grammarian is an unauthorised journal devoted to the protection of the Mother Tongue at Glassboro State College. Our language can be written and even spoken correctly, even beautifully. We do not demand beauty, but bad English cannot be excused or tolerated in a college. The Underground Grammarian will expose and ridicule examples of jargon, faulty syntax, redundancy, needless neologism, and any other kind of outrage against English.

Clear language engenders clear thought, and clear thought is the most important benefit of education. We are neither peddlers nor politicians that we should prosper by that use of language which carries the least meaning. We cannot honorably accept the wages, confidence, or licensure of the citizens who employ us as we darken counsel by words without understanding. And so, to the whole college community, to students, to teachers, and to administrators of every degree, The Underground Grammarian gives

———————

WARNING!
RAPE
of the Mother Tongue
WILL BE PUNISHED!

THE WANDERING SCHOLAR

THE following specimen was collected and analyzed by our field investigator, who reads everything. Remember that. We quote in full a memo from Stanley B. Yeldell dated October 20, 1976. Even the casual reader is repelled by the jargon forward for send, commence for begin, and the unspeakable necessary and essential, but our wandering scholar explores the failures of thought and logic which always accompany bad English. And vice versa.

In reference to the above captioned matter; please be advised that the above committee will serve as a center for all complaints, problems and related matters of safety and security.

Moreover, the intent of said committee is to examine, investigate, recommend, and attempt to resolve safety and security matters that affect the welfare of this campus.

However, this committee deems it necessary and essential that the college community forward suggestions to this committee.

We hope that you will help said committee provide a vital service that has been overdue; but we maintain that we are alive and ready to commence.

Moreover, we urge you to forward your suggestion, complaints, and inquiries to any of the subsequent members of this committee, who are listed on the reverse side of this letter.

This notice illustrates the avoidable ugliness, redundancy, imprecision, pretentiousness, and slovenly diction common to much writing distributed on this campus. Each fault is illustrated in the first sentence. A concern for clarity and precision would have suggested to the writer the direct statement, The Safety and Security Committee will serve as a center. . . Such directness would have saved nine words and would have avoided the clumsy vapidity of In reference to the above captioned matter and above committee. Directness would also have prevented the incompetent setting off of an introductory phrase with a semi-colon. And furthermore, directness and precision would have relieved Yeldell's nagging fear that his readers would not easily identify his committee. He might then have avoided the ugly legalese of said committee in two places.

The use of the conjunction but in the third paragraph is curiously illogical. As the common adversative conjunction, but is used to connect clauses in which the total effect of one clause is opposed to the total effect of the other. In this sentence, Yeldell apparently wants to emphasize the contrast between providing a vital service and being alive. This implies that vital service is not usually provided by committees that are alive, or that vital service is usually provided by committees that are not alive. This sentence is made even more curious by the use of maintain in we maintain that we are alive. . . Here, maintain seems to mean "to support or defend through argument." Thus the clause implies that this assertion is, at least, arguable, or that the committee may be dead. Not being familiar with the committee, however, we cannot absolutely conclude that the use of maintain is an example of slovenly diction.

The last sentence begins rather oddly with an illogical moreover, that not only reminds the reader of the misuse of but and the questionable vitality of the committee, but also conjoins these memories with an urgent request that all readers forward suggestions, complaints, and inquiries to any of the subsequent members. . . Of course, the confusion created by the misuse of subsequent is partially clarified by the final inaccurate clause, who are listed on the reverse side of this letter. Nevertheless, subsequent means "following in time or coming later than something else." Considering the questionable vitality of the committee, a reader, guided by the apparent meaning of the clause and not a charitable guess at the writer's intentions, could interpret the request to mean that complaints and inquiries should be sent to members of a later committee. Good idea.

QUOTE WITHOUT COMMENT

EVERY month The Underground Grammarian will publish examples of indecent exposure–unseemly public displays of bad English at Glassboro. Any reader who can't see anything wrong with our examples had better stop sending out memoranda.

It is important to note that these four thrusts of the college have given emphasis both to programs tending towards vocational/ occupational needs and to programs tending towards the needs of the generally educated, cultured citizen…. It is useful to analyze past and future in this bi-functional manner, however.

Mark Chamberlain, Planning for 1976-77–and Beyond, p. 2.

Your attempt to camouflage the fact you are copping out fails.

Richard Ambacher, in The Glassboro Whit, November 11, 1976, p. 3.

Next Month: A guided tour through the English Course Guide.

What Can We Do?

The Underground Grammarian does not advocate violence; it advocates ridicule. Abusers of English are often pompous, and ridicule hurts them more than violence. In every edition we will bring you practical advice for ridiculing abusers of English.

This month's target is any barbarian who says advisement. We can advise, or give advice, or even do some advising. Advisement permits nothing beyond what we can already mean with the words we have. Perhaps, by analogy to confinement, it might name a condition in which we suffer the consequence of having been advised; or, like government, it might indicate some cloud of loosely related abstractions and institutions. Those who say it to us must simply mean advising, but they fear that a clear naming of what they do will reveal how little it needs doing, and they will find themselves in the streets selling wind-up toys. Such people feel degraded unless what they do ends with -ment or some other official sound such as -ation or -ivity. Work that ends with -ing makes them nervous.

Do not boo and stamp your feet when some barbarian says advisement; it will bring reprisal, for barbarians are vindictive. Simply mutter, just loud enough to be heard, “Clickety-click-click.” This requires no lip movement and suggests a wind-up toy. With a female barbarian, an equally good response is “Ding-dong,” familiar to all television-addicted barbarians and suggesting some more appropriate career in cosmetics.

When advisement appears in a document sent by campus mail, smear it with something foul and return it to the sender.

Good Hunting!

ABOUT SUBSCRIPTIONS & OTHER THINGS

There are no subscriptions. We don’t lack money, and we may attack you in the next issue. No one is safe.

We will print no letters to the editor. We will give no space to opposing points of view. They are wrong. The Underground Grammarian is at war and will give the enemy nothing but battle.

THE UNDERGROUND GRAMMARIAN

Volume One, Number Two……February 1977

GRAMMAR AND ECOLOGY

The betterment of fools, Goethe tells us, is the appropriate business of other fools. The Underground Grammarian does not seek to educate anyone. We intend rather to ridicule, humiliate, and infuriate those who abuse our language not so that they will do better but so that they will stop using language entirely or at least go away. There are callings in which the abuse of English doesn’t matter; ours isn’t one of them. When

Bole Administration Building is loud with the clatter of ball-point pens falling from the trembling fingers of frenzied administrators, when semi-literate instructors furtively eye the classified ads looking for honest employment as salesmen in discount stores specializing in floor-covering, when the Faculty Senate disbands because no one is willing to risk uttering gibberish in public, then The Underground Grammarian will have reached some of its goals. If we do our job well, more and more people at Glassboro State College will emit fewer and fewer memoranda. The taxpayers of New Jersey will be spared the cost of thousands of reams of paper; duplicators will consume less energy; professors could put into teaching the effort now expended in replying to inane surveys and checking meaningless ballots that will choose one mediocrity rather than another to serve in a position of no significance; and tall trees saved from destruction will stand for long years in noble forests.

Virtues foster one another; so too, vices. Bad English kills trees, consumes energy, and befouls the earth. Good English renews it.

GLIMMERINGS

Consider this minor atrocity–the first paragraph of a memo to a senate committee, from Barry Loigman, November 30, 1976:

Last Spring, Dr. Chamberlain requested that the Senate hold in abeyance the guidelines for this year's committee. The reason being the uncertain implementation timetable for A328. Dr. Masat requested this of the Senate which indeed approved these guidelines and voted to hold them in abeyance.

This isn't worth much attention. Its worst technical fault is the juvenile "reason being" fragment, and the occasional incoherencies and jargon, even the faulty punctuation, might still earn a minimal passing grade for a freshman.

Consider also this sentence from Faculty Senate Highlights, December 3, 1976:

The Curriculum Committee brought to the Senate's attention that the original purpose of Intersession be restudied.

The same publication quotes a new policy:

All intersession courses, prior to being offered a second time which have not been approved as a regular course or which the sponsor does not wish to submit as a regular course proposal, may be submitted to the Senate Curriculum Committee into a category termed Intersession Only.

Do we have to put up with this? Is there no member of the senate disturbed by bad English, not one skillful enough in his own tongue to instruct his colleagues?

These examples, indistinguishable from the dismal student writing of which we all complain, come from the minds of people who take the state's money for the work of their minds. They are probably loud in praise of "excellence." Yet they seem not even aware of their incompetence in language, the mind's most basic tool.

We see why so few students can write English; few teachers can write English. The ability to write and speak clear, correct, conventional English is not an antiquated social grace; it is an indispensable skill of our profession and the medium in which teaching and learning happen. How can the teacher who can't write make intelligent judgments about what students write? How can students put confidence in a teacher whose language is imprecise, barely coherent, and sometimes meaningless or simply wrong?

We need a reading and writing competency test for teachers and administrators. Obviously, we can no longer assume that a graduate degree demonstrates, among other things, competence in written scholarship. In future editions, The Underground Grammarian will make some suggestions about such a test, especially as it might serve in the evaluation of tenured faculty and provide objective data about candidates for promotion or retention. We can call it "career development."

THE IMMORTAL WORDS OF…

. . . the Committee for Human Experimentation, in a letter to Mark Chamberlain, November 4, 1976, author unspecified:*

. . . the physical design of the equipment to be used in the experiment was not detailed with sufficient specificity to ensure that failsafe mechanisms will be operative in the event of any mechanical malfunction.

What Can We Do?

There is something here called Experiential Education. No one is sure what that means. Student-teaching, apparently, causes an experience; calculus does not. An arrangement which awards college credit to the student who licks paper tape in the shipping-room of the wind-up toy factory is called experiential; learning to speak a new language is not. This seems hard to understand, but it isn't.

When we say our thoughts clearly, we often see that they are stupid. Sometimes we see that they are also self-serving. The idea behind Experiential Education is both. Experiential as used here is worthless because it makes no useful distinctions. It is used by administrators to give presumed importance to the pedestrian labors which take them so long to accomplish and for which they take so much of the taxpayer's money.

Furthermore, people who can blithely tolerate experiential can't have done much thinking about its meaning. That would indicate either dimness of mind or indifference. Thus we have to conclude that our Experiential Educationists [?] may be less interested in the meaning or doing of their jobs than in having them. And behold! All this is revealed by paying attention to one word.

Many more words on this subject can be examined in a booklet called Center for Experiential Education. Call 445-7316 for a copy. It's full of bad English. While you're on the phone, nonchalantly ask some of these questions:

1. Who writes all that snappy copy?
2. What actually happens to a rendered decision?
3. When students are considered a full-time student and students interested in Co-op must be a full-time matriculated student, is that something mystical? Or what?
4. Did Mark Chamberlain really say that?

And don't forget to ask for your share of "a wide range of administrative support services related to the continuing development of experiential education in all academic areas."

Good Hunting!

Wind-up Toy Award

ALAN J. DONOVAN

Dean of Arts and Sciences!

The Wind-Up Toy Award is presented to those who use advisement in public. Input and interface as well as thrust will also earn Wind-up Toy Awards. These words might be appropriate in private between consenting adults.

The award indicates our recognition of those talents best suited to sellers of wind-up toys in the streets.

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* We must add that while the author's English is bad, this committee's judgment is good. The letter quoted was a rejection of an extraordinarily ungrammatical proposal by J. Ronald Posey. Our annotated edition of a part of that proposal will appear within the next two weeks. Reserve your copy now. But how?

THE UNDERGROUND GRAMMARIAN

Volume One, Number Three……March 1977

THE GLASSBORO PLUMBERS

An excellent plumber is infinitely more admirable than an incompetent philosopher. The society that scorns excellence in plumbing because plumbing is a humble activity and tolerates shoddiness in philosophy because it is an exalted activity will have neither good plumbing nor good philosophy. Neither its pipes nor its theories will hold water. John Gardner

Shoddiness in plumbing is easily detected–in philosophy, not so easily. Shoddiness in professing, however, can often be found in the neighborhood of bad English. It is all

too common to meet professors whose degrees have been earned by clerical labors rather than sustained, written scholarship, and who seem to be given doctorates as routinely as illiterate teen-agers are given diplomas.

These cut-rate professors are more informed than learned; they put faith in every trend without having explored the merit of any tradition; they know “findings,” not lore; they have “perceptions,” not understanding; they are “innovative,” not original; they are enthusiastic about the “relevant,” ignorant of the permanent. Their knowledge of the great history of thought is so scanty that when they have any ideas at all they imagine they have discovered fire, and visit upon us whole plagues of novelties and gimmicks.

An outer and visible sign of intellectual shoddiness is the inability to express and examine ideas clearly and logically. But let’s give what credit is due: the plumbing at Glassboro seems just fine.

KETTLES & POTS

Even our local Faculty Association is worried about bogus degrees, or, at least, those bogus degrees held by other people. Here’s what the Association has resolved:

WHEREAS the official bargaining agent and the President of Glassboro State College have negotiated a memorandum of agreement requiring that an individual who is pursuing a terminal degree specify reporting to the President… the name of the institution where he intends to study,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the GSCFA seek to have further negotiations between the President and the bargaining agent conducted to the end that the President … will be required to certify the acceptability of that institution’s accreditation, or candidate status thereto, and notify the individual concerned whether or not a degree obtained from the institution concerned will, or will not, be recognized for reappointment or promotional purposes.

This is not the language of educated people–it isn’t even legal language–it is pretentious gibberish. To address in such language a matter of educational standards requires either sublime ignorance or plenty of brass. The document is signed by Carolyn Addison, but was probably concocted by a number of people and then approved–think about that for a minute–by an even larger number and then shamelessly flaunted before us.

It's bad enough that we have to read this stuff, but now we will have to watch the Union and the Association quarreling as to who loves Excellence the better, eating their crocodiles and drinking up their eisel, the poor lass the while cold dead in the grave. But be of good cheer; your Underground Grammarian knows how to handle funny degrees either from universities or matchbook covers.

Our Department of Accreditation has prepared the following letter. All we have to do is fill in the blanks, send copies to all sorts of interested parties, and the original to Temple or to Ann Arbor or to a motel in Sarasota or wherever:

Dear Dean —— :

A certain —— ——, currently a member of this faculty, claims to have earned an advanced degree from your excellent graduate school. It is hardly possible, however, that you would have so distinguished anyone whose English sounds like this:

"————"

You will be, of course, glad of this chance to defend your good name by confirming our belief that such writing could never have met your high standards, and that the writer is an imposter.

As soon as we hear from you, our President will act swiftly and forcefully, perhaps even going so far as to contemplate the possible formation of a committee which might consider some guidelines.

In the meantime we reluctantly remind you that your accreditation by The Underground Grammarian depends entirely on the written English of your graduates. If, therefore, —— —— has in fact been mistakenly given one of your degrees, all you need do is revoke it, lest he bring you into further disgrace.

There is no profit in separating the dross from the chaff. Spinach is spinach, wherever it grows, and we say the hell with it.

What Can We Do?

Here is some prose by Phillip A. Tumminia, a Vice-President for Campus Planning. It is taken from a memo of November 29, 1976:

I am responding to you apropos the recent petition concerning the Triad because I know that you were instrumental in bringing the problem to my attention. I would appreciate if you would inform those individuals who have signed the petition of the College's action.

I have spoke with Mr. Peter McEvoy, the owner of the building, and he has assured me that he will instruct his staff to correct the problems which are identified in the petition. Based on past performances, I have every reason to expect that this action will occur.

I have asked Ed Cunard of my staff to follow up on the concerns for correction of Physical Plant problems within the Triad. It is my understanding that he will work with the Triad Building Maintenance so that when problems are corrected, we will have a record of such action.

Without belaboring anything, we see jargon, lots of padding, misplaced and dangling modifiers, comma faults (both of omission and commission), elementary errors of syntax, and even some unusual notions about capitalization. (And let's hope that "I have spoke" is only a typing error.) This is the public work of a Vice-President of Glassboro State College. He is paid $28,359 a year.

But wait before you judge. Even at a college there is work to be done which doesn't require scholarly abilities. (Our campus gardener is a genius, and he can write any damn way he pleases.) Maybe Tumminia has special expertise in Campus Planning. To be sure, the memo suggests good old-fashioned "maintenance" rather than Campus Planning, but who knows? Maybe it's too technical for us.

Here are a couple of things you can do about this:

1. Call Vice-President Tumminia at 445-5276 and ask how you too can find profit and excitement as a Campus Planner. Tell him how thrilled you are at the thought of a nifty academic career for which you won't have to bother with learning to write.
2. Call President Chamberlain at 445-5201 and ask for your own vice-presidency. After all, somebody has to choose colors for next year's decals, or see to providing enough left-handed desks for our left-handed students. Just don't ask to be Vice-President for Grammar. Only important stuff is done at that level.

Good Hunting!

Correction

Last month's Wind-up Toy Award was mistakenly presented to an Alan J. Donovan. We meant, of course:

ALAN B. DONOVAN

Our humblest apologies to Alan J. Donovan, whoever he may be.

THE IN BASKET

When wise men disapprove, that's bad;
when fools applaud, that's worse.
A Spanish proverb

The Underground Grammarian is grateful for many expressions of approval overheard here and there. This is heartening, for it shows that there is concern about English at Glassboro. We give thanks as well to all those who send us examples of bad English to be exposed and ridiculed. Keep it up. Let the barbarians know that the English underground is watching and the next memo may have a fuse. Send it to us and we'll set it off. If you don't know where to find us, ask around. Failing to fetch us at first, keep encouraged.

THE UNDERGROUND GRAMMARIAN

Volume One, Number Four……April 1977

GET THEE TO A LIBRARY

…all that a University, or final highest School can do for us, is still but what the first School began doing,–teach us to read. We learn to read, in various languages, in various sciences; we learn the alphabet and letters of all manner of Books. But the place where we are to get knowledge … is the Books themselves! It depends on what we read, after all manner of Professors have done their best for us. The true University of these days is a Collection of Books. Thomas Carlyle

TO OUR SHAME, we must tell our readers on other campuses a sad truth: Glassboro State College is not the citadel of learning that it must seem to those whose impressions of it come from The Underground Grammarian. We have, for instance, no library. We have a learning resources center.

Names count. Something happens in the frequenter of libraries that doesn't happen in the utilizer of learning resources centers. The one takes water from a spring; the other checks out with a six-pack of diet Pepsi.

Administrators who think of themselves as "managers" and think of schooling as "production" know that a mind is at last overthrown by repeated cant. If we form the habit of calling a library a name that smacks of a place where transmissions are repaired, then we will come to believe that the nurture of the mind and the repair of the transmission are qualitatively similar, and that educated people can be produced. This is false.

Good teachers may guide and impel, but educated people are all self-educated, having read, marked, learned, and inwardly digested many books. Many have actually become educated without filmstrips and thus learned to write good English along the way.

ANOTHER VICE-PRESIDENT HEARD FROM

THE successful bureaucrat knows how to keep his head down and his business out of other peoples' noses. It is difficult, for instance, to uncover a specimen of the public English of our unobtrusive Vice-President for Academic Affairs, Lawson J. Brown. The Underground Grammarian, however, has a long nose and has sniffed out the following.

Effective September 1, 1976, the drop/add procedure, as well as the withdrawal process for individual courses are revised to comply with the revisions of these policies.

Well, Brown is surely a successful bureaucrat, but the real comer knows enough to cast a little of his bread on the water and slip a piece of his own take–$34,510 in this case–to an educated secretary who can manage commas and make verbs agree with subjects. After all, somebody in a vice-president's office should have enough education to wonder about the difference between a course and an individual course, and to be at least hesitant about revising procedures to comply with a revision of policies.

The letter from which the quote is taken is dated June 17, 1976, and appears on the front cover of a barbaric brochure intended to explain Academic Standing Policies. We don't know who wrote the text. Brown's letter says only that "a brochure has been prepared"–the buck-passing passive which suggests that no one does these things; they just happen. All we can do is condemn the brochure for letting itself be prepared as a horrible example.

It starts with an arresting assertion, a pithy thematic statement of thesis and just the sort of thing a vice-president thinks:

Satisfactory progress towards the degree is necessary in order to achieve the goal of completing an academic program…

And later we read that "the grade of INC must be absolved before the end of the following academic semester." And the "actions" which may be taken are "dismissal," "probation," and "continue." And at one point–a mystical proposition:

If upon appeal to the Committee on Academic Policies and Procedures, it is judged that the student is not making unsatisfactory progress but his/her progress toward the degree is still less than satisfactory, said student will be placed on probation.

Did Lawson J. Brown write all that rubbish? If so, we think he might serve us better as vice-president for something else, campus planning maybe. If not, did he read it? If he could find no fault in that stuff, we think he might serve us better as vice-president for something else, campus planning maybe. Maybe he didn't read it, but blithely sent it out into the world to shame us all. In that case, we think he might serve us better as vice-president for something else, campus planning maybe.

+Valiant agents of the grammatical underground report that Lawson J. Brown reads this journal very closely, hoping to find grammatical errors. That'll be the day.

SEEKS LENGVITCHES I AHM SPIKKING, ANGLITCH DE BAST

HERE are two messages from our Placement Office, the first in an undated memo from one Betsy McCalla, the second (we can hear Mumford now–Dammit Betsy!) rewritten in the Newsletter of February 24, 1977. Italics are added:

On March 1st and 2nd, 1977, Career Awareness Days will be held…It's purpose is to inform the students on our campus the different kinds of careers one can explore after graduation from college.

On March 1st and 2nd, 1977, Career Awareness Days will be held…The purpose is to inform the students on our campus of the different careers one can explore &c…

We applaud the insertion of of. We have gloomy doubts about the change from It's purpose to The purpose; we fear that the rewriter, having discovered that days was plural, tried They're purpose, felt vaguely uneasy about it, and settled safely on The purpose.

That's the good news–he tried. The third sentence, alas, shows that the second wasn't needed at all. Here is McCalla's version:

Over 100 representatives from different careers will be available to speak to the students…

From this sentence any fool can figure out the purpose; the rewriter has saved a mess of bathwater in which there never was a baby.

The third sentence, however, brings the rewriter a new problem: "representatives from different careers" sounds unEnglish. (Good to hear, though. Some Career Awareness Days have 100 representatives from identical careers.) The phrase is an excellent test of the Bulgarian Hypothesis, which asserts that whatever sounds natural in a thick Bulgarian accent ought to be changed. Try it: How dew you dooink? I ahm rahpresentahteev frahm kahreer. Sounds fine.

How does Mumford (it must be Mumford) deal with this? Well, naturally, he turns careers into career areas, confident, like us, that no self-respecting Bulgarian would go that far.

THE IMMORTAL WORDS OF. . .

. . . Norman Mayall, in a memo of January 31, 1977:

I do want to point out that in the event of any difficulty, i. e. fines, arising over your compliance, this will be totally your liability.

Brief Notes

WE ARE GLAD to report that culprits ridiculed by The Underground Grammarian are being ridiculed on other campuses (eight so far) from Boston to Berkeley and from Minnesota to LSU. Be comforted, therefore, if we expose you in print; think of the free publicity! How pleasant, at a conference in Kansas City, to find that strangers recognize your name. Such friendly smiles!

For last January's Grammarian we had prepared a commentary on a crudely written open letter from Richard Ambacher to some now forgotten apparatchik in Trenton. Short of space as usual, all we could do was cite a single sentence in Quote without Comment and file the analysis for future use. Now we hear from an agent that Ambacher, even with the help of some friends, just can't see what's wrong with that sentence. Well, it figures.

Letters, queries, brief comments on grammatical matters, may be sent to:

The Underground Grammarian
Post Office Box #203
Glassboro, New Jersey 08028

Horrible examples gratefully accepted.

THE UNDERGROUND GRAMMARIAN

Volume One, Number Five……May 1977

Nolo episcopari

THE UNDERGROUND GRAMMARIAN is not carrying on a vendetta against vice-presidents, even though this issue examines the work of another of that numerous brotherhood–as thick at Glassboro as those leaves at Vallombrosa. It's just that garbled English seems the more odious the higher the rank of the garbler. We imagine that a vice-president of a college ought to be first a scholar, or at least learned. We imagine a man or woman who has been an excellent professor, not only an expert in an academic discipline, but broadly educated, as able to draw wisdom from Epictetus and Cervantes as from Wittgenstein and McLuhan. We imagine a vice-president who serves with some reluctance, knowing that he is needed but hoping, like Cincinnatus, of whom he has heard, to return some day to the furrow. If you imagine something similar, call now the long roll of our vice-presidents and weigh them in that balance.

When Cicero's friends planned a statue in his honor, he dissuaded them, saying that he would rather that the people asked, "Why is there no statue of Cicero?" than "Why is there a statue of Cicero?" Now call again the roll. Of which was it ever asked, "Why is he not a vice-president?" Of which do we not ask, "Why is he a vice-president?"

Where profit is the end of enterprise ambition may be virtue, but in a professor it is corruption and an insult to his calling. It is an irony of the academic world, therefore, that those most eager to wield power are least likely to give good service. Thus it is that presidents and vice-presidents and deans, and even chairmen and faculty senators, are usually the wrong people, thirsty more for office than obligation.

The college would be better served were all such offices filled from the ranks of the faculty by lottery. That way we have some chance of finding a suitable administrator once in while, and the worst risk we would take is that nothing would change.

The 16.2 per cent Solution

GLASSBORO STATE COLLEGE has vice-presidents the way the Romans had Huns and Visigoths. Where do they all come from? How many are there? How much will we have to pay them to leave us alone? Will they ever develop a written form of language?

This month we have learned that Kenneth R. Clay is a vice-president.* We don't know what he's vice-president for–it didn't seem worth asking, but we can tell you what he's vice-president against. Education is what he's against. His prose is merely awkward, pompous, and obscure, with only rare failures of agreement (that dreary kind of writing in which data invariably indicates); but his ideas, if truly revealed by his words, are demonic. First the prose, from a memo to Mark Chamberlain et al., 2/24/77:

I would suggest that a good institutional standard of efficiency should be 20 per cent of seats provided but unused in any semester. While the overall college totals do not exceed this total by very much, our real problem is a mismatch between where load time is available and where it is needed as reflected by the wide variation in these figures between various departments. Seats provided vs. seats unused is only one factor of efficiency or potential productivity and is based on class size limits determined by departments… Any manipulation of class size limits would show a different picture.

"Mismatch between where…" is perhaps a literal translation from Visigothic, but "seats provided vs. seats available is one factor" is traditional American bureaucratese. So too is the fatuous "real" problem, a lofty sign of the writer's suspicion that his dim-witted readers would think the problem imaginary if it were simply called "the problem."

Such writing is expected from an assistant sales-manager in the wind-up toy factory. Listen to this woeful refrain:–institutional standard of efficiency–wide variation of figures–factor of efficiency or potential productivity–show a different picture. It is the jargon of merchandizing. And it is the mentality of merchandizing which permits, in the same memo:

1. Some departments have the potential of much greater productivity, or
2. They could produce the same level of productivity with considerably reduced load time, or
3. Are at maximum level of productivity…

These judgments flow from a profound and pernicious ignorance of the art of teaching and the aims of education, an ignorance nourished by bad writing, for those who cannot find alternatives to the jargon of trade cannot find alternatives to the values of trade either. You can take the assistant sales-manager out of the wind-up toy factory, but you can't take the windup toy factory out of the assistant sales-manager.

Well, so be it; but if we can't overturn the tables of the money-changers we can at least turn their tables on them, for behold, it is written–"Those that take the factor of efficiency or potential productivity, let them perish by the factor of efficiency or potential productivity." Here's a revision which, in the context of the entire memo, omits nothing important:

The college is almost 80 per cent efficient; some departments do better, some worse. Different expectations would change the figures.

Where Clay has used 105 words ("with approval of the dean" was omitted above), we have used 20. Clay's factor of efficiency is therefore 19.0%. Alternatively his factor of inefficiency is 81.0%. His memo finds the college as a whole only 26.7% inefficient, which means that Clay is 3.034 times as inefficient as all the rest of us put together.

But wait. Clay's third and fourth sentences say partly what has been said earlier, partly what the readers must already know, and partly that different numbers are different. Our second sentence is therefore not needed, and the revision takes only 14 words, raising Clay's factor of inefficiency (do try to keep all this straight) to 86.67% and lowering his factor of efficiency to 13.33%. Making allowances for something or other, we average 19.0 with 13.33 and subtract from 100 to a gross (you better believe it) adjusted factor of inefficiency or potential unproductivity of 83.8%. The data indicate, therefore, an efficiency factor of 16.2%. (See Table.)

+TABLE

SELECTED FACTORS OF EFFICIENCY BY THE CLAY METHOD

Foundations of Ed. 95.5% / Fine & Perf. Arts 65.3%

Admin. Studies 94.4% / Early Childhood 37.7%

Glassboro St. Col. 73.3% / Kenneth R. Clay 16.2%

These numbers reveal a problem and also a real problem. The mere problem is easily solved: Clay's annual salary is $33,493, and 16.2% of that is $5,425.87. But that real problem–that's something else.

The man who thinks such things–what can he possibly know of the meaning of education? Perhaps he doesn't think such things but only says them because they are fashionable in our pseudo-managerial administration. Is that better? Bad enough, merchants in the temple–and shall they now presume to teach us doctrine?

The immortal words of John Ottiano

From a memo to art faculty, February 26, 1977.

I indicated that our image has been shifted to other institutions of higher education and strongly felt that an upgrading of our public relations should be reevaluated and that Glassboro should once again take the Initiative to be the strong force in art education and the visual arts.

News and Notes

THE UNDERGROUND GRAMMARIAN now begins its summer vacation. We'll be back in September with more of the same. There's plenty of it.

Our thanks to all who have sent letters and specimens. Be patient. In time we'll give every outrage attention. Please remember, though, that we ridicule only Glassboro English. Every other college has its own barbarians; may each find its own Grammarian.

In spite of the evidence we have shown you this year, we suspect that there may be intelligent life at Glassboro. The way they look at you sometimes–why it's almost as though they understood. Accordingly, we intend to publish next year a series of pamphlets devoted to essays by Glassboro people–students, faculty, plumbers, even vice-presidents.

There are no restrictions on topics, but remember that an essay weighs ideas; it doesn't "report findings." You may use your own name or no name or a pseudonym. (We suggest Alan J. Donovan–he never did turn up.) In payment you'll be given, if we know who you are, fifty copies. The other 1150 will be distributed on the campus.

We hope to provide at Glassboro a public forum for the exercise of the mind and freedom of inquiry, which includes the freedom to be stupid, the freedom to be wrong. We will print well-written essays even if they are stupid and wrong. It'll serve you bloody right.

Please send manuscripts–1500 words or less–to:

THE UNDERGROUND GRAMMARIAN
Post Office Box #203
Glassboro, New Jersey 08028

* What a blunder! Kenneth R. Clay is not a vice-president; he only seems to be a vice-president. He is a dean. In this article and in the editorial above, what is said of vice-presidents must go for deans as well. It does. A lady asked Dr. Johnson how he could have made a certain mistake in his dictionary, and he, not the least abashed, replied, "Ignorance, Madam, ignorance."

THE UNDERGROUND GRAMMARIAN

Volume One, Number Six……September 1977

Some Good Advice for New Students

NO MATTER what they told you in the guidance office, the ability to write clear English is the most valuable skill you can take to a job interview. It is an uncommon skill, and commercial enterprise needs it badly and rewards it well.

Few can ever learn to write well–indeed, in the next few months you'll learn how unusual it is for even deans and vice-presidents to write correctly. Should you be one of the few who can learn to write, you should protect yourself at Glassboro by following most of the rules below. They won't teach you how to write, but they will make it harder for us to pretend that it's not for us to do.

Be sure that every course you take requires written assignments and that grades will penalize bad writing.

Reject the idea that there are courses in which writing is not appropriate. A course which does not require the sustained mental discipline of expository prose is not what you need in college. You can get that in the evenings at the YWCA.

Try to find out what, if anything, your instructor has written since leaving graduate school. (The librarians in the research section will be delighted to help, but it might not be a good idea to give your right name.) If you find something, read it carefully and make a judgment. If you find nothing, just make the judgment. What more do you need?

Be wary of any instructor who can push the correct button on a tape machine every time or thread a projector without swearing.

Stay away from courses which require oral reports, gimmicks designed to serve the instructor's convenience by eating up class time and sending him home with an empty briefcase and lots of free time to watch re-runs of Mod Squad. Besides, you surely remember what Freud must have said: "Und zo vee zee, chentlemen, dass at verst es kommt der oral rebort, aber die nexte–a-ha!"

Take your GRAMMARIAN to class and set it ostentatiously on top of your desk.

Don't let your classes interfere with your education. Read books. Write.

If you'd rather be poked in the eye with a sharp stick than do any of these things, don't be discouraged. You may easily find a splendid career in education.

Mark Chamberlain Writes Again!
(From a letter to John Schaub, 3/29/77)

Even in the most quantitative subjects there is some error or at least a lack of reproducibility in determination of scores on any one examination; in subject areas in which more subjective determinations are made, this lack of reproducibility is exacerbated.

Typographical Note: Just look at those hyphens. There are kinds of English prose which simply can't be justified.

NEITHER can his mind be thought, to be in tune, whose words do jarre; nor his reason in frame, whose sentence is preposterous. Ben Jonson

Olny England is asking for volunteers to help in caring for artistic children. And God knows, they need all the help they can get.

Laser, Shmazer

If the trumpet give an uncertain sound,
who shall prepare himself for battle?

THE experienced concert-goer knows how important the first note is. How much can we hope for after a ragged attack or a failure of pitch at the start?

Who, therefore, can give any weight to the April edition of LASER–Seven Authors in Search of General Education, no less–when the first sentence of the first essay blats out a failure of agreement? "A rash . . . herald the fact." No one has time for such stuff, so we skipped to the next essay, where we found:

Among the forms which mark the side of John Keats' "Grecian Urn," is the vignette of those coming to the sacrifice out of some little town.

What a muzzy jumble. The forms "mark" the side? An urn has a side? Perhaps a poem has a side, since the forms are said to mark the side not of an urn but of a poem, John Keats' "Grecian Urn." (That the title is given incorrectly is no great crime, but it does make us wonder.) We read no more of this.*

The next essay begins: "Let me wax idealistic for a moment on the subject of General Education in the Fine and Performing Arts." We'll let a writer wax anything he likes, but we wax almost wroth when he pads out his piece asking the permission which he has already assumed to do so. Nor will we suspend judgment because he scuffs his toe in the dust and says, "Aw golly, fellas, I'm just waxing idealistic." Perhaps it's writing as one of the performing arts.

The next piece is unaccountably ascribed to two authors–perhaps by the one as told to the other?–and begins with a firm grasp on the obvious:

There are certain institutions of higher learning . . . in which students may be awarded a baccalaureate degree without being exposed to the most important contributors to Western culture and their achievements.

There's a spooky notion–being exposed to the contributors, and the vulgarism exposed to, with its whiff of gamma rays, is unhappy in this context, but the most arresting thing about the sentence is that what it says is as thoughtful and interesting as "Close cover before striking." If we could bear to read on we would expect to agree with this essay, but so what? We've been agreeing with it for as long as we've been closing covers before striking. Maybe the authors are young.

The subject of a sentence should usually be the name of something concrete. Here's a pretty good sentence: Students worrying about getting jobs have been flocking to the business schools. It's a statement that tells us what some people are doing, and that's what the next author ought to do. Instead he tells us what preoccupation has been up to:

The preoccupation with employment has led to an influx of students into the business schools.

We're not going to read any essays about preoccupation. The author himself isn't sure what to do with it, since he obviously means not "preoccupation with employment," not unknown even to tenured professors, but preoccupation with finding employment, which is all too little known to the same.

And another thing: It needs the tinnest of ears to tolerate influx in this context. Gross.

In the next essay, the work of one of our musicians, we can at least hope for gracious sounds and rhythms, and we read it aloud to savor the flow of its phrases. Do the same.

As a representative of a department which is constantly under attack for having curricula which are insufficiently "liberal" in construction, I am impressed by how little light is shed upon this question by the perpetual dialogue between faculty and administration.

He ought to be made to sing it. He's used enough nouns for a paragraph, an awkward pairing of which clauses, four prepositional phrases in a row, a hackneyed light is shed, a needless in construction, and the silly hyperbole of perpetual. And the next sentence begins with "In the context of the Glassboro situation," a phrase which must remind any composition teacher of that old favorite of struggling freshmen everywhere: In the modern world of today. . .

So there they are, seven authors in search of a general education, as well they might be. The search is premature, however, for is it not written: Seek ye first the Kingdom of Grammar, and a general education shall be added unto you?

English Lives!
Friends of Grammar
Drink a Toast

THE UNDERGROUND GRAMMARIAN is glad to have been accorded the disapproval of fools and the applause of the wise. We are honored especially by the approval of Prof. J. Mitchell Morse, Professor of English at Temple University, author of valuable books and articles on literature and language, and a teacher.

On July 8, 1977, Professor Morse was given the B. A. Bergman Award of the Free Library of Philadelphia for "outstanding literary achievement." The citation described him as one who has defended

by brilliant precept and stubborn example . . . the highest standards of English prose, both within the classroom and without, often in the teeth of indifference or hostility.

In this passage we find no errors.

Here at The Underground Grammarian we know a thing or two about those teeth of hostility–and the spongy gums of indifference–and we rejoice to salute J. Mitchell Morse, a brave Grammarian.

Brief Notes

A MEMBER of the Grammatical Underground reports that this year's Middle States evaluation of GSC will include an assessment of grammatical competence in both

faculty and administration. We will, of course, give the evaluators a complete file of back issues as well as our collection of original documents and unpublished commentary.

We urge our readers to call 445-5247 and request a copy of PERSONNEL NOTES, volume one, number one. It's a shame to have to castigate such earnest effort, but PN is typical of the sleazy appearance and pitiful writing of all those mimeographed sheets that sadden the heart at Glassboro. Why must so many of our publications sound like seventh grade newsletters as advised by assistant guidance counsellors? PN, for instance, has a department called "DIDJA KNOW…" We don't know who writes their stuff, but we're going to visit local churches listening for somebody who prays: Give us our bread on a daily basis.

Fran Masat served as editor of that sorry issue of LASER and must have been delighted to find that editors don't have to do anything at all. Why, anybody can be an editor! And why not? After all, this is Glassboro, where anybody can be a dean and anybody can be a vice-president. Logically and accordingly, Masat has decided to flee the classroom and become an assistant to Lawson Brown, whose grammar we explored last April. And a fine pair they'll make. Brown can send out memos about the "action of continue" and Masat can edit all his stuff.

Examples, comments, and queries may be sent to
THE UNDERGROUND GRAMMARIAN at Post Office Box 203,
Glassboro NJ 08028.

* Advice to Frank Goodfellow from Dr. Johnson: "Read over your compositions, and whenever you meet with a passage which you think is particularly fine, strike it out."

THE UNDERGROUND GRAMMARIAN

Volume One, Number Seven……October 1977

J. RONALD POSEY,

victim of a severe grammatical attack, wrote us, before he left Glassboro, a letter in which he applauded, although he could not share, our belief that the system could be made to work, and urged us to keep up the attack on the “make-believe scholarship at Glassboro.”

He signed himself, “J. Ronald Posey, Failure in English,” but his letter was a model not only of clarity but of courtesy and manliness.

Glassboro State Thousands Sold!

WHEN we devise courses that give our students what they want, we become peddlers. Few students want to read and write, and we pander more and more to their disinclination. As if by an academic counterpart of Gresham’s Law, the trashy courses drive out the good, and the students pant after easy studies, faddish novelties which will shortly prove as valuable a force in the growth of the mind and spirit of man as the Nehru jacket.

Glassboro is a business with managers and employees, a business subsidized by taxpayers in proportion to the number of jobs in the shop. But everybody knows this. Unless we are content to remain an academic fast-food outlet, we must subvert the system and see to it that our students are given not what they want but what they need. We are paid to know the difference.

“The slovenliness of our language,” said George Orwell, “makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts.” Precise language makes it easier for us to have intelligent thoughts. In the context of any discipline, therefore, a teacher can do nothing more valuable for his students than to require of them precision of language and clarity of thought. This means that every course must require that students demonstrate in writing that they know the matter and can think about it clearly.

If our students can’t do those things, we are a trade school, but not a good one, since effective trade schools work without pretense. If we want to teach trades, we can open a take-out window, but those who sit to dine must have it our way. They want to fill their bellies with a tangy snack: we are called to nourish them.

Let’em Eat Twinkies

If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is
a father, will he give him Wise potato chips?

HERE is the complete text of the second paragraph of a memo from a Lizziel Sullivan, Tutorial Specialist, to all department chairmen, September 1, 1977. It has not been edited; the recurrent three dots do not, as is customary, indicate omissions. They seem to be some kind of punctuation:

Upon completion of high school, it is mandatory that all perspective [sic] E. O. F. students attend a six week residential/ academic experience for E. O. F. students. During the six weeks, the students become familiar with the various offices on campus … are oriented to the Registration Process and Financial Aid, etc. … participates in academic skills building in the areas of Language Arts, Communications and Math. Students in the Summer Program are also exposed to the E. O. F. Tutorial Program during the summer. Along with skill building in the above mentioned areas, students are also exposed to individualized group and peer tutoring to accommodate their learning experiences in the classroom.

This is the kind of writing that makes the toughest teachers cry, partly because it has so many faults that one doesn't know where to begin correcting them, partly because simple "correction" would be useless where the writing reveals a fundamental ignorance of conventional principles–capitalization, for instance, or flaws of style or taste, but mostly because the writer probably thinks that her writing is good. We have, after all, given her the title Tutorial Specialist, for which she is presumed to have shown some competence. Nevertheless, her writing is bad.

We don't dream of "correcting" it, but we can serve a good cause by listing some of its obvious faults. (Think of it as a game–if you can find at least one of each you don't need a Tutorial Specialist. If you can't find any, you could be a Tutorial Specialist.)

Misplaced modification
Failure of subject/verb agreement
Incorrect punctuation
Incorrect capitalization
Awkward repetition
Jargon
Padding
Faulty diction
Redundancy
Weird italics

To anyone who has taught composition, this is a sad, familiar list. Except for the last item (what can it mean?), it tells us what we can expect of any poorly taught or talentless freshman. It further hints that this writer is unlikely to improve without expert teaching and close supervision. In other words, this is where we need a tutorial specialist. Somehow or other, Lizziel Sullivan has been set down on the wrong side of the desk.

It isn't her fault. She didn't seize the post of Tutorial Specialist; some one chose her for it. Some one read her application, considered her recommendations, studied her credentials, and decided that she was the one we needed to do the work of a Tutorial Specialist. We'd like to know his name.

The "EO" in EOF stands for Educational Opportunity, and the students in the EOF program would seem to have a right to that at the very least. In Sullivan's words:

. . . students are recruited* who have had a poor academic high school experience but have the potential and now are positively motivated to pursue a college education.

Obviously some opportunities are more equal than others, and these young people, however great their "potential,"† are now given the opportunity to learn what passes for English in the world of tutorial specialists. Starving, they come to us for nourishment, whether they know it or not, and we slip them the Big Mac of the mind, the fast food of "academic skills building." After all, how should they know the difference, doped for so long on the soda pop and pretzels of careless education? They ask bread; we give'em an English McMuffin. Our educational system–and that includes, clearly, all this EOF business–seems marvelously contrived to invert the old hymn: The rich have we filled with good things and the hungry sent empty away.

We return now to the unknown person who said to Ms Sullivan, "You, you're the one!" He was either able or unable to judge her ability to write English. If unable, he oughtn't to be allowed to choose tutorial specialists. If able, something is fishy. We have to conclude that he made his choice out of incompetence or for some reason not related to the welfare of the students given into his charge.

Perhaps, even probably, there is no such person; this sort of thing requires not only a committee but a whole chain of command–they love to be called that–and finally the place where the winded buck pauses briefly, gathering strength for the return trip. Here the last signer of papers signs the last papers, secure in the knowledge that he

can always point over his shoulder and mumble, “The committee did give me, and I did eat.” And only the students have anything to lose.

We don’t mean, of course, to trouble anyone with this problem; presidents and vice-presidents and deans are too important to be bothered with failures of agreement. Besides, we can propose a simple resolution.

All we need do is choose a new Glassboro alma mater. We have in mind just the thing, a catchy little number which will provide an additional benefit by precluding any chance, however slight, that some dismal miasma of academic solemnity might some day dampen the just-plain-folks jocularity of our comical commencements. The plastic hamburger folks would be delighted to give permission just for the thrill of hearing us, students and faculty getting it on together, waking the echoes with the stirring “You deserve a break today. . .”

And That’s Not All!

There are also some people here dealing out something they please to call Developmental Education, a self-important euphemism for remedial English and math. Here, taken from an unsigned, undated memo, is their idea of written English:

The enclosed is the complete course selections for Developmental Education courses. As of 9/6/77 all sections are closed. Please post the course selections on your bulletin board as most of the courses have been added after the Fall Schedule was printed.

The failures of agreement and tense, and the mistaken conjunction are bad enough, but if it means what it seems to mean (but who can be sure?), there was no need to send it out.

Isn’t there anyone around here who can do something about this? Or even wants to?

English Lives!
Friends of Grammar give a Toot!

GUSTAVE MELLENDER is momentarily president of Passaic County Community College in Patterson, New Jersey. Don’t buy stock in him. He has abolished true/false and multiple choice exams, required that even math tests include essay questions,

and said in public that all teachers are to be English teachers. He has sent some students away as wasters of public money, and told many others that they must spend a year or more in remedial work before they can begin to earn credits.‡ He actually wants to find out how well his teachers are doing by giving all students comprehensive exams.•

We ask our off-campus readers, especially those in history departments, to be mindful of Mellender next spring when he goes job-hunting. There's even hope that he'll become president here at Glassboro next year, if, as seems probable, the selection of a new president is going to be left to the editorial board of THE UNDERGROUND GRAMMARIAN.

Until then, we content ourselves with saluting Gustave Mellender, a valiant friend of grammar and a man of principle.

Brief Notes

- If you think we have problems, just think of Cornell University, where they have an apparatchik who is styled Dean of Writing. Splendid, you say? Wrong! He writes:I had communicated with Dean Levin on the general problem several times, starting last spring, and the second, that of over acceptance came to me in late August.This man, Robert Farrell, is leading a return to literacy. (N.B., Deans: "leading a return" is an archaic way of saying "spearheading a thrust.") Happily, he has been exposed and humiliated in the student newspaper.What an idea! The Grammarian can't be everywhere, but bright young students are everywhere. We do have a subscriber at Cornell, himself a dean, but a grammatical dean. By the time you read these words, he will have had his orders to form Grammatical Guerrilla Group Alpha. Tomorrow the world.
- Fran Masat has lost out to John Collins, erstwhile basketball coach. Even more than he needs editing, Lawson Brown needs a good zone defense.
- We will not attack the students who write for The Whit. Grammarians teach students. In fact, we invite them to join us as Grammatical Guerrilla Group Beta.

* Note how this needless passive messes up the syntax of her sentence. Had she said "we recruit" she'd have found the right place for the restrictive clause.

† The good writer uses "potential" as a noun only as a precise term in physics or when it means "that which might be as opposed to that which is." E. g., Coleridge: The potential works in them as the actual works on them!"

‡ Here at Glassboro we give college credits for sixth grade level remedial courses. What do you think we are? Elitist snobs?

• Our union has told us that the evaluation of tenured faculty is “unsavory,” which makes us wonder whether such folk as surgeons and pilots have similar views. Their work might have consequences.

THE UNDERGROUND GRAMMARIAN

Volume One, Number Eight……November 1977

I would certainly consider it correct professional behavior to describe procedures for teaching and aiding understandings of how communication with visual materials can express, describe and give form and structure to the unique character, technology and spirit of our experience in these late years of the 20th century. George Conrad

Which Hunting in The Underground Grammarian

M. B. Newton, Jr.
Editor, Pioneer America

IT IS, to be sure, a debatable matter among contemporary grammarians, but, in view of the stalwart stance of The Underground Grammarian in defence of good, clear, correct writing, I can only wonder why that elegant (and we hope, mighty) journal tolerates ambiguous use of which. The point that I want to make is that every civilized device that can be used to clarify writing ought to be carefully cultivated, which is an opinion that the Grammarian surely endorses.

In the September, 1977, Grammarian, which is an outstanding example of the printer’s art, I find three instances of softness on which-ism, to wit: “A course which (that!) does not require the sustained mental discipline of expository prose…” “Stay away from courses which (that!) require oral reports…” “‘In the context of the Glassboro

situation,' a phrase which (that!) must remind…" These are the only original lapses into which-craft in this number, which is encouraging. But the Grammarian's criticism of that scribble by the musician dealt directly with which clauses and failed to take note of the which-switch that further compounded the awkwardness of the passage, nor did the Grammarian note that "awkward pairing of which clauses" is actually a pair of restrictive clauses, the second restricting the first, and that both require the relative pronoun that.

Of course, the counterattack–if the Grammarian disagrees with me–can be joined on the ground that Dr. Johnson, as quoted in a footnote on page 2, was also soft on which-ism, as are, of course, the King James Version and The Book of Common Prayer. Nevertheless, the struggle, which has gone on for generations, ought not to be resolved by an ad vericundiam, which is a venerable fallacy, but on the basis of greater power for writers.

Homer has some figure or other proclaim of the decadence at Odessius's homestead, "The Fish rots from the head!" Because The Underground Grammarian has become, for many at least, the head of a restoration movement the Grammarian should help stamp out creeping which-ism. Let the antigrammarians quail before our battle cry, which is: "I'd rather fight than which!"

M. B. Newton is not only an editor but also Associate Professor of Geography at Louisiana State University. Although clearly an intransigent grammarian of the old school, he has a certain endearing trait. He wrote, of our decision to publish non-Glassborovian authors: ". . . it will make the turkeys who surround you realize how far the word has gotten and how much respect The Underground Grammarian commands."

Dear Grammarian,

I had lunch with a colleague, and we fell to talking shop. He said that there weren't really any standards by which we might say that English is good or bad. I have heard that often, of course, but never from anyone who did much writing. So I asked, and, sure enough, he hadn't written anything since he left graduate school, and he wasn't about to. Well, I asked, what about his students? Did he make any judgments about their writing? No, he did not, because he never saw any of their writing. He gave what he called "oral" tests sometimes (be grateful–it could be even worse) and never

assigned papers, though his discipline is one in which expository writing is ordinarily thought a useful indicator of a student's knowledge and understanding. He confessed, furthermore, that his own "oral" competence was meager but still not reason enough to justify preparing written lectures. Like the lilies of the field, he toils not, neither does he spin; but, unlike the fowls of the air, he does gather into barns–every other Friday in fact.

Well, he founded me dumb, because, while I don't share his grammatical agnosticism, I am aware that I don't know what I think until I've found the way to say it. So I have tried hard to write clearly on this subject so that I can see what I think and judge it, an exciting venture, by the way, from which my sub-literate colleague is excluded.

The least important measurement of English comes from fussing about who and whom and split infinitives. The "rules" (we all know this, don't we?) tell us what English does, not what it must do. Aha! says my oral friend. See! The rules don't tell me what I have to do! And he's right, they don't, unless he'd like to speak conventional English. There's no law of nature that forces us to drive cars to the right of the road, but many think it "correct" to observe that convention.

There are many ways in which English can be conventional. Consider: You are at the police station to identify a culprit. "That's he," you gasp. Have you spoken correctly? No. It will serve you bloody right when a sneering sergeant says, "Whom're you trying to kid? That's a plain-clothes cop." "Correct" English is correct conventionally and in context. Down at the police station the correct form is "That's him!"

It is correct, furthermore, not because the policemen don't know the difference but because they do know the difference. They will know, if you say "That's he," that you are being inappropriately formal, rudely calling attention to what you mistakenly deem one of your many merits, and, possibly, insulting them all by your presumption that they need you to set a good grammatical example.

Mutatis mutandis, we can say that a failure of agreement from Maxine Colm in Laser or a misplaced modifier in an official letter from Phillip Tumminia must be judged wrong and insulting, unless, of course, those things are deliberate insults. In that case they would be correct and insulting. Deliberate rudeness is a valuable and effective way of sending messages, but inadvertent rudeness is simply an outward sign of an inner ineptitude. Which is it, then, when Kenneth Clay sends us a singular verb form to go with data? Does he mean that he scorns our conventions, consciously or not, or is he simply ignorant of the number of data? I would prefer the former, but I suspect the latter. So do you.

Who asserts that there are no standards had better prepare to swallow some camels. He must find no fault in the following, a recent letter to all of us from John Schaub:

Please advise the Faculty Senate Office Secretary, extension 5244, the names of Chairpersons of Dept./Office Promotion and Tenure and Recontracting Committies as soon as possible.

He has to contend that "advise the secretary the names" is all right, since to do otherwise is to assume standards. That's not the end. He would equally have to accept, had Schaub written it, "advise unto the secretary of the names" or perhaps "make advisings toward secretary in regardment of names." And if we should do with this passage what Sidney Smith suggests for flaccid prose and cut out every other word, our standardless turkey would have to defend the result, probably by muttering something about how English keeps changing, you know.

Have I gone too far? Are these examples so absurd that they vitiate the argument? (Are they as absurd as the assertion that the President of the Faculty Senate at Glassboro State College can't spell committees, but that it doesn't matter, since English spelling has changed in the past and will change in the future?) From preposterous premises preposterous conclusions must flow. No standards means no standards; it does not mean some standards that suddenly appear, like warning lights on the dashboard, only when total breakdown is imminent.*

We teachers claim that teaching is a "profession," but we tolerate–and some of us will defend–an amateurish sloppiness in the use of language, the basic tool of teaching. Why can't we get things right? Why must Board Briefs confuse up-to-date with up to date? Why must an AFT circular say insure when ensure is meant? If your physician said that your pantella was strained and decided to put it into attraction, wouldn't you like to sneak a peek at that diploma while he's figuring out which end of the stethoscope gets stuck and where? Would you have a suggestion?

No prudent teacher would put up with a dentist, or even a plumber, who handles his tools as awkwardly as many teachers handle their language. If you want to call yourself a "professional," be sure that you are master of all relevant techniques. In the technique of language, merely to avoid all the "mistakes" of convention and context is not enough, although even that would be refreshing around here. The professional in any calling handles his instruments easily and accurately, even gracefully. So here is another standard that the world (i.e., the taxpayer) will measure us by without caring at all that English changes: A coherent passage of error-free prose is the least we can require of those who take our money as professionals in teaching. In fact, at these

prices, we can demand more than elementary conventional correctness. We can demand skill.

Qui s'excuse, s'accuse, but he'll probably be little troubled by me. People who say there's no way to judge English need to believe that. He's not reading this anyway. He's just not into print, you know.

Just as soon as I can walk again, I'm going to invite him to another lunch so I can send him to this great chiropractor I know.

Yours in English,
R. Mitchell, A.C.M.

MELTING POT DEPARTMENT

Rose Glassberg reports that Komiko Murashima will represent the AFT as a member of the Professional Ethnics Committee.

FORGOTTEN, BUT NOT GONE

Alan B. Donovan, long unheard from, writes us all as follows;

The intention of this guidebook is to offer for your consideration and, hopefully, use a comprehensive and detailed presentation . . .

As such, many thanks are due Mary Anne, who with her diligence and obvious command of the art of teaching and encouraging good writing has authored this rather unique document.

We just love, hopefully, the way he authors, don't you? As such, it may be less than rather unique, but it's unique enough for us.

THE PASSIVE STRIKES AGAIN

"Good programs that enhance our image in the community and state are focused upon in this section of the newsletter." (GSCFA)

Brief Notes

THE UNDERGROUND GRAMMARIAN has become a member of the Educational Press Association of America. We subscribe without reservation to their Code of Ethics and can still assure our readers that there will be no changes in our policies or practices.

R. Mitchell of our staff has been promoted to the post of Assistant Circulation Manager. Send letters, mss., examples, whatever, to his attention at Post Office Box 203, Glassboro, New Jersey 08028.

* Suppose I had written “eminent.” Those who say there are no standards would suddenly decide that there is at least one standard after all, and Glassboro would be treated to a prodigy-turkeys crowing. If I had written “immanent”, could they be expected to know that that too was crow-worthy? How many would pronounce such errors unimportant, because English keeps changing, you know? How many, this very moment, are wondering how they can manage to borrow dictionaries without giving their names?

THE UNDERGROUND GRAMMARIAN

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The Sin of Clumsiness

J. Mitchell Morse
Temple University

AYENBITE OF INWIT [Remorse of Conscience], a popular fourteenth-century handbook of virtues and vices, says we don’t sin unless we first consent to sin. It refers specifically to sexual sin, and to conscious decision. But the sins of the mind are more subtle, and the decision is not necessarily conscious. Our inner labyrinths

are in so devious that often when we sin intellectually we think we are making a decision for virtue.

This delusion is particularly easy to fall into when it coincides with the widespread popular delusion that intellect is evil. That the myth of the evil intellectual is widespread and popular there can be no doubt, in view of the frequent blatant expressions of it by people like Spiro Agnew, Clay Whitehead, George Wallace, and Roman Hruska; even we who consciously reject it are often influenced by it in our unconscious habits. Just as the citizens of a paper-mill town don't smell the sulfur fumes that thicken their yellow air, so we tend to be unaware of the pervasive fear of mental clarity, and to share it unconsciously. We turn off our minds for the same reason that we turn off our lights: we want to sleep in darkness.

Every ruling group wants the masses to be docile, uncritical, unquestioning, unthinking. Virtue, therefore, has always been associated with ignorance and inarticulacy. In view of the exacerbated official anti-intellectualism of the last quarter-century, bad grammar is now a badge of safety, an assurance that we are real folks, not pointy-headed innaleckshals or elitist snobs. The basic cause of bad writing is not lack of brain power but lack of courage.

That is why many of those who are drawn to administration write poorly. Not all but many administrators–although they don't know it–don't dare to write well. They have subconsciously surrendered the power to think with literate clarity, lest they be unacceptable in the way that Adlai Stevenson and Morris Udall were unacceptable.

So have many of us teachers. We are afraid of the pseudo-populists. The most unconsciously reactionary of us all are those who–in the name of radical populism–want our students to remain complacently ignorant of the English in which books are written.

Is it any wonder that our students think and write confusedly?

The first step toward curing this disease, I have found, is to make the patient aware that he has it. Once our students realize that they have the bad habit of intellectual timidity, they begin to have the possibility of writing clearly. For many administrators, however, I fear there is no cure. They have chosen the life of clumsy obfuscation. They have long since consented to sin. They love it.

J. Mitchell Morse, Professor of English at Temple University, noted author and teacher, has contributed to this journal, and to the cause of good English, not only this fine essay, but a constant supply of encouragement and strength.

A Narrow View

WE have a letter from a person here at Glassboro. He applauds our decision to publish essays by grammarians out in the rest of the world, saying: “You have made your point here–now on to bigger things.”

He rejoices too soon. We have made a point, perhaps, but little more, and we will not cease from troubling until we see changes.

We are looking to the day when Glassboro State College is known afar as a school where there is no abdication of intellectual or scholarly integrity and where students in all disciplines learn to read and write and think clearly. This may take a while.

It would take less time if only certain persons of influence–and our congratulator is one of them–would forbear to applaud until they have taken the point we’ve made and put it to use, perhaps by puncturing something. Over-inflated pseudo-academic pretensions, for instance, generate lots of bad English and go off, when punctured, with splendid bangs.

In the last few weeks thousands of people have heard of Glassboro State College as a school where literacy is, at least, a public concern. Should some of those people choose to send their children here because we seem to prize reading and writing as the heart and soul of learning, it had better be true. We know of no “bigger” things.

Long Underdue

THE DEPARTMENT of Foundations of Education* has proposed a workshop in “intercultural education” to tack three more hours onto a course in the same thing, if that is a thing. From reading the proposal, we guess that both course and workshop call for lots of relating and interacting, and, naturally, problem-solving,† with “foci on direct field experience” and “working on real school or/and‡ community problems.” (That sure beats indirect field experience and fake problems, but these folk are into professional matters,• not amateur dabbling like math or history.) As far as we can tell,

there will be no study of any identifiable body of knowledge, just rapping, preferably with someone who says Mama mia! now and then.

This workshop is not expected to have results; it anticipates “outcomes,” outcomes of some “nature.” One anticipated outcome is:

of the nature of . . . development of ability to anticipate factors likely to influence proposals for changes in human relations . . .

What this means, of course, is that they hope the student will be informed, rational, and prudent. So hope we all; but to suggest that there are forms of rationality and prudence specifically germane to “intercultural relations” is fatuous. To suggest further that some one knows how to instill those virtues is patently absurd, if not mendacious. Who is rational and prudent needs no workshop to teach him how to be rational and prudent about Bulgarians any more than a man who can find the diameter of a circle needs to be schooled in the methodology of finding the diameter of a pizza; and who is neither prudent nor rational will scarcely be helped through chatting with Bulgarians. Furthermore, who would become knowledgeable about Bulgarians will do better to study their history or language or literature than to pursue

Development of ability to apply selected tools or procedures for analyzing, assessing, and surveying school and/or community provisions for intercultural education.

And how will students show that they have (get? interact with? what?) these outcomes? The proposal looks for “taped evidence of interaction with other cultures” (they probably mean a person from another culture), “oral presentations that exemplify good intercultural education practices,” “peer performance assessments,” “records of participation,” (in what, would you guess?), and even “practical written tools” (try to figure that one out).

We must put aside small questions (How, for instance, is a good intercultural education practice different from other good education practices?) to explore the central question: What, exactly, is the subject matter here? Is it information about diverse cultures? That is available–inescapable, in fact–in the study of anthropology, art, economics, geography, history, language, literature, philosophy, religion, and many other traditional disciplines. Is this the study of the collisions of cultures and their effects upon one another? Ditto. Is this a study of tolerance and love?

The proposers cannot intend either of the first two, for if they do, there is no need to propose anything. Let's hope they don't mean that third possibility. There must be some limits to what they can teach.

If intercultural education is in truth some new subject matter not yet widely known, it must have been described somewhere in clear English and with concrete reference to things in the real world. We deserve to hear such a description, since the language of the proposal tells us little (that's often the aim of this kind of jargon) and makes us suspect much.

We must in fairness say that the proposal has been given comprehensive, penetrating scrutiny and analysis by the very Dean of Professional Studies, so it seems only honest to print her commentary–in full:

A good idea–long overdue.

WE have heard careless talk on campus suggesting that The Underground Grammarian has inhibited the production of prose at Glassboro and may even have blighted the careers of some of our so-called victims. Poppycock and au contraire, dear friends. Prose pours plenteously forth as ever, and the "victims" have flourished like the green bay tree. One of our earliest "victims" shortly became a chairman, and another was recently granted tenure by an unusual process totally independent of our ordinary procedures. So there! We can't wait for the next promotion list for further evidence of the good things that happen to those fortunate enough to be cited in these pages.

Furthermore, not one authenticated case of writer's block can be proved against us. Even Stanley B. Yeldell writes on, undaunted.

You may remember Yeldell, the first writer to be quoted and discussed in this journal. Not having heard from him in about a year, we did have some misgivings, but here he is again, obviously undamaged, offering an Intersession** course which he describes thus:

The course will examine the major symptoms that influence the presence of organized crime and the role of the legal system in organized crime control. Moreover, said

course will identify the political, sociological, and economical characteristics that have an impact emphasize such vice crimes of an organized nature; Gambling, Prostitution, Drug Traffic, Pornography, etc.

We were baffled at first by “major symptoms that influence the presence,” but a few minutes with a dictionary suggested:

. . . the more important of various signs or tokens tending to modify or determine the nature of the discernible existence in a certain location or set of circumstances . . .

Well of course! If only he had said that in the first place. And “said course” is prudently intended for the typical undergraduate reader who will probably forget from one sentence to the next just which course the writer has in mind. The difference between economical characteristics and economic characteristics is harder to grasp, but maybe those attributes that make things cheaper to operate could be so named–cleanliness in a carburetor, for instance, or infertility in a mistress. There may be some omission in the neighborhood of “impact emphasize,” but who can be sure?

We ask you–have we had an inhibiting effect, or any effect whatsoever, on the prose of Stanley B. Yeldell? Apologies may be sent to the address given below.

English Lives!
(well, sort of)

Mary Anne Palladino has written a booklet that will help any teacher to judge and improve student writing. It is good. It cost the taxpayers lots of money. There is no reason to expect that anyone will use it.

Brief Notes

Because of recent publicity, THE UNDERGROUND GRAMMARIAN has become more widely known. Many well-wishers have written; ill-wishers, so far, remain silent. A man in San Francisco applied for a job, and a man in Texas put in his order by telephone. This is good, of course, but it brings us to the problem of subscriptions. Here is the solution:

If you are not a Glassborovian but would like THE UNDERGROUND GRAMMARIAN mailed to you, all you need do is ask. We’ll send it.

If you are not a Glassborovian and would like to make a small donation to our work, that's fine.

Please note that these options are not related, and neither is offered to Glassborovians.

This issue marks the completion of our first year of publication. We began expecting that there would be nothing left for us to do after a few months, since our mere existence would straightway put an end to bad English at Glassboro. That has not happened. Reluctant but resigned, we trudge on to Vol. II.

The Underground
GRAMMARIAN

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R. Mitchell, Assistant Circulation Manager

We turn off our minds for the same reason that we turn off our lights:
we want to sleep in darkness.

* Glassboro has many different teacher-training departments and countless courses. This department deals with foundations. Foundations are-well-oh for heaven's sake-you know what foundations are!

† A phrase made popular by John Dewey and now de rigueur in educationistic proposals. Proposing new workshops is a favorite form of problem-solving. back

‡ The familiar "and/or" is just part of the jargon of intellectual laziness; "or/and" is new and exciting.

• At Glassboro all the teacher-training departments consort together as the Division of Professional Studies, a name which suggests that while the incipient science teacher may have smatterings of chemistry and physics, his professionalism is something else.

** This year's Intersession catalog offers many opportunities to earn kollege kredit without any nonsense about reading and writing. If cooking and sewing seem too demanding, try the skiing in Vermont, or four weeks of poppy-rock music, although that one is probably too juvenile for college students. Or how about promoting some self-awareness, or sensitizing yourself to social stigma? We recommend How to Make It in the Outside World, although we can't imagine why anyone who could actually do that would have to teach it. After a course like that, you might not have to become a teacher.